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SUBJECT: JOURNALIST ACCUSES PRESIDENT WADE OF MURDER

REF: DAKAR 2756

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In a recent book entitled "The Judge Seye Affair: A Contract Killing," journalist Abdou Latif Coulibaly accuses President Wade of instigating the assassination of Supreme Court Judge Babacar Seye. Pape Ibrahima Diakhate, Assane Diop and Cledor Sene, shot Judge Seye on May 15, 1993. The three men were found guilty and sentenced to 18-22 years in prison. Wade himself was jailed for seven months during an investigation before being released for lack of evidence. In an attempt to close debate on this issue before the 2007 electoral campaign, Wade's parliamentary majority passed in 2004 the Ezzan Law, which amnestied all political crimes over the past 25 years, including the Seye affair. Coulibaly's book attempts to undermine the goal of the Ezzan Law. It has rekindled the debate about political violence in Senegal and has weakened Wade's moral authority. END SUMMARY.

ONE OF THE MURDERERS BEARS HIS SOUL

¶2. (U) Abdou Latif Coulibaly's book is based largely on the testimony of Diakhate, who indicated that the murder weighed on his conscience. Diakhate gave details of the execution, claiming President Wade (who at the time was leader of the opposition), his wife and some members of their entourage -- such as Samuel Sarr, current Director of Senelec (Senegal's electricity company) -- ordered the assassination. According to the book, Wade was greatly disappointed by the results of the 1993 presidential elections and, therefore, decided to focus his political ambitions on legislative elections later that same year. However, when the President of the Constitutional Council quit and Minister of State Youssoupha Ndiaye was named to replace him, Wade feared Ndiaye would squelch any victories by Wade and his party. Consequently, he allegedly told Diakhate and the others, "You must assassinate him." Coulibaly reports in his book that Mrs. Viviane Wade gave Diakhate and his associates the equivalent of thousands of dollars prior to the assassination to buy arms and rent a get-away car. After determining that murdering Ndiaye was not logistically feasible, they decided to "prove their loyalty" to Wade by killing Ndiaye's deputy, Seye.

¶3. (U) After nine years in prison, Diakhate and the other two murderers were freed following the Ezzan law's adoption in 2004. Coulibaly writes that during their imprisonment and even after their release, all three were given large sums of money to maintain silence. Coulibaly also indicated that the Ezzan law was orchestrated, at least in part, to free the three men.

¶4. (U) After the book's publication, Diakhate gave a

radio interview, retracting his testimony and asserting that he had lied to Coulibaly. Since then, some in the media have openly questioned why all the criticism has been directed at Coulibaly while overlooking Diakhate's role in the book. As one local newspaper put it, "Did he lie when confiding in Abdou Latif Coulibaly, or in recanting his own account?"

WADE'S UNDERSTATED REACTION

¶5. (SBU) Wade has publicly stated that he will not seek to have Coulibaly arrested, is not concerned by the allegations and will not respond to them. That said, some of Wade's associates who are accused in the book of being complicit have indicated that they will sue the journalist. There are already rumors that the book will be banned in Senegal. One bookstore that sold a limited number of copies of the book received a visit from customs officers. An employee of the store told Embassy staff that she did not know if they will have the book on sale again. The GOS appears to be exerting pressure on booksellers to prevent free distribution of the book in Senegal. Unofficial versions are readily available on the Internet, but Coulibaly says he only takes responsibility for the accounts presented in the hardcopy edition published by Harmattan press in Paris.

COULIBALY A PAWN?

¶6. (SBU) Wade confidants have asserted that Coulibaly is the instrument of people who wish to tarnish Wade's image. A close aide to Minister of Interior Ousmane Ngom told Embassy staff that the Government is sure Coulibaly is being manipulated because Harmattan agreed to publish the

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book only after a substantial order was placed. The aide said Coulibaly lacks the financial resources to make such an order. Several in Wade's entourage think former prime minister Idrissa Seck, now opposed to Wade and in the midst of a criminal trial, supplied information and funding to Coulibaly to discredit Wade and accelerate the end of his political career. Segments of the ruling Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) and their allies are already calling for Coulibaly's arrest.

¶7. (U) As Senegal's most notorious muckraking journalist (on November 11 he received Transparency International's "Integrity Award" for his investigative work on corruption in Senegal), Coulibaly is no stranger to controversy. He has close ties to the Sud Communications Group, a media group under legal fire following its October 17 broadcast (Sud FM) and printing (Sud Quotidien) of an interview by Casamance separatist military leader Salif Sadio. Coulibaly is a former Director of Sud FM and currently Director of a private journalism school bankrolled by Sud Communications. Sud's media outlets are among the most brazen and vocal critics of President Wade's regime.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Coulibaly's book marks a new episode in the fierce battle between the PDS and its opponents. The Ezzan Law, intended to defuse debate that could harm the PDS, has started to backfire, as opposition figures and journalists no longer hesitate to make serious allegations against the President and his entourage. There is a growing conviction that political battles will be won in the media and the court of public opinion rather than in courtrooms. END COMMENT.

JACKSON